



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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WOODFORD.—A meeting was held on June 7th, at Minto House, Snaresbrook, when a reading was given by Mrs. Dietrichsen from *Parents and Children*. The chapter chosen was "The Philosopher at Home," which deals with the management of an unruly, violent-tempered child. The reading was followed by a very interesting discussion. Mrs. Whitaker was in the chair.—A garden meeting was held at Woodlands House, on June 12th (by the kindness of Mrs. Meano). Mrs. Spedding-Curwen took the chair, and a report of the Annual Conference was read by the Branch Representative, Mrs. Hamilton. It was impossible in a brief sketch to do justice to the many interesting lectures: it was also equally impossible to speak too highly of the syllabus provided for this year's Conference; not only were the speakers and lecturers of the best, but the subjects chosen were most helpful and full of suggestion. It is most important that copies of *Parents' Review* should be taken, as a full report will be given of all proceedings in the July and August numbers.—The last meeting of the Session was held at Mrs. Albert Wilson's, on June 26th, but the attendance was so very small that Miss McLean kindly agreed to postpone the reading till the autumn.

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THE POET WORDSWORTH.*

BY REV. W. TUCKWELL.

IN various places and to very different audiences I have lectured on your great Poet: I speak of him now for the first time within sight of the mountains and within hearing of the streams which inspired him living and mourned him dead.

It is with some misgiving that I handle a theme, familiar possibly from childhood to some amongst those who hear me, and hardly to be approached, as they may think, without presumption by a stranger. Yet a prophet's own country is behindhand sometimes in acceptance of his greatness and interpretation of his message; nor can there be many here to-day whose youthful opening era of poetic enthusiasm synchronised, as did mine, with that decade of the past century, in which, Scott and Byron having passed away, Tennyson not yet risen, Wordsworth held the field in the universal estimate of contemporary intelligence: of cynics like Matthew Arnold, sceptics like Mark Pattison and Arthur Clough, cosmopolitans like Crabb Robinson, sentimentalist like Aubrey de Vere and Frederick Faber, austere agnostics like Stuart Mill, religious devotees like John Henry Newman.

Well, then, I shall take my chance—petitioning for indulgence from the practical Wordsworthians present, who may

* A Lecture delivered at the House of Education, Ambleside, on Thursday, June 20th, 1901.

meet my every utterance, as Cromwell met Roger Wildrake, with "I know what thou wouldst say";—endeavouring to conduct, in a temper at once critical and reverent, an act of homage to an Immortal in the Temple consecrated by himself.

It is a commonplace of travellers that scenes of high natural beauty are inhabited by a lowly organised population: that nature exhausts herself in sublime production of mountain, valley, forest, lake, and finds her remnant of strength restricted to the formation of human simpletons and Philistines; that where every prospect pleases only man is vile. It is true of many spots within and beyond our shores; it is not true of the native Cumberland and Westmoreland lake-dwellers. Inhabiting the most beautiful of English regions, they represent the noblest type of Englishmen: manly, upright, self-respecting, independent, possessed of substantial comfort through a system of small proprietorship which, universal once in England, has survived to some extent in this retired corner; their isolation sufficient to intensify home affection without stagnating into ignorance and rudeness; they are as much above the midland and southern labourer as the peasants of north and central France are above the wretched starvelings of its south-eastern vineyards. Even in their decay they are not ordinary mendicants; the Leech-gatherer and the old Cumberland Beggar, both drawn from life, are picturesque, firm of mind, useful, dignified, in harmony with surrounding Nature, awakening in other hearts affection and sympathy redeemed from contempt or even pity. Sprung from this exceptional stock, deriving their temperament and habitually contemplating their virtues, the great Poet of whom we are to speak owed to them a twofold heritage: the moral and the mental fortitude which sustained and shaped his genius, the reverence for his kind which saved him from mere impersonal enthusiasm, associated Mankind with Nature in his mind as in harmony with and essential to the full meaning of the external world, dowered his poetic aspiration with the noblest aim of Poetry, the glorification of "Man, of Nature, and of Human Life."

He was born in 1770, son of John Wordsworth, who, sprung from an ancient middle-class Yorkshire family, had settled in Cockermouth as an attorney and agent to the Earl of Lonsdale. Of this monster, resembling not so much an

English nobleman as a mediæval Robber baron; of his barbaric pomp, his unparalleled eccentricities, and of the terror attaching to his person, wild tales were still current when I first knew the Lakes: he lived a Herod's life, and he died the horrible death with which at least two of that strange race were smitten. Borrowing from Mr. Wordsworth £5000, he refused to pay interest or to refund it, retaining on his own side the entire Bar of the Northern Circuit when his agent took proceedings against him at the Assize. Not till after the Earl's death was principal and interest repaid to the family by his successor, the Good Lord Lonsdale, as he was called; and the youth and childhood of the Poet and his brothers were financially crippled by the injustice. The children were five in number; Richard, of whom we hear little, John the Sailor, William the Poet, Christopher afterwards Master of Trinity, and one sister Dorothy. The boys were sent to the Hawkshead Grammar School on the banks of Esthwaite; the poet's name carved on a desk is reverently preserved, and the cottage of his Dame Ann Tyson, recorded in the *Prelude*, may still be seen. Though saddened by his father's death, it was a happy time; he was free out of school hours to ramble, fish, row, skate; already, as he tells us, realizing ever and anon that Nature had spiritual secrets underneath her outward beauty, awed with a "dim and undetermined sense of modes of being." He went to Cambridge—was out of his element there—made few friends—came back rapturously to Hawkshead for his holidays, to write verses, to ponder in solitude, to feel by degrees that his life mission was settled for him by a Power not himself, that he was a dedicated Poet. He went on a walking tour through France, opening his heart to the first ecstasy of the Revolution, spent some time in London; publishing his earliest volume, *The Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*; passed through three years of sadness and of conflict, uncertain as to his profession and his future, his faith in God and man shaken, even his delight in Nature dimmed. His native purity of soul, his constitutional religious instinct, his alliance with the virtues and happiness of Cumbrian homes, would have carried him through the fermentation of heart and mind which all young men of ability undergo, and led him back to serenity; but his restoration was hastened

by the good fortune which brought a new influence into his life, the companionship of his sister Dorothy. Dorothy Wordsworth was one of those rare beings, at once highly gifted and self-abnegating, who are content to minister to another's genius and be lost in another's light. She possessed phenomenally what her brother lacked: sensitiveness to the *minuter* loveliness of Nature, the details of sun and cloud, of light and shade, of tree colouring and wild flower grouping, of snowflake and raindrop, butterfly and bird, of nodding daffodil and fading celandine. These things were not noted by her brother until she *couched* his eye to see them: once seen they yielded up to him their treasures of immortal meaning; but many of his most delicate verses would never have been written but for her intellectual second sight, discerning and presenting to him the materials for poetic evolution:—

"She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares, and delicate fears,
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,
And love, and thought, and joy."

And she did more than this. Intervening at the critical moment of his life, she saved him from despondency, cleared his heart and head,

"Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self:
She whispered still that brightness would return,
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
A Poet, made me seek, beneath that name,
And that alone, my office upon earth."

More than one writer has described her. Her person is such, says Coleridge, that if you expected to see a pretty woman you would think her ordinary, if an ordinary woman you would think her pretty. Her manners are simple, ardent, impressive, her information various, her eye watchful in minutest observations of Nature, her taste a perfect electrometer. Her brother speaks of the shooting lights of her wild eyes, and the same feature impressed De Quincey. wild and startling he calls them and hurried in their motion, revealing a fire of impassioned intellect, which, now instinctively pushed forward and again diffidently checked, gave an air of self-conflict to her demeanour and sometimes even a slight stutter to her voice. Her figure he adds was

slight and somewhat short, her complexion of a gipsy tan. She joined her brother towards the end of his three anxious years, and they started together on the first of those walking tours which were in the future to diversify their simple life. By coach occasionally, but mostly on foot, they traversed the north of England, fearless of rain, snow, cold, heat, tempest; lodging at cottage or farmhouse, living on bread, potatoes, milk; scheming a life together in some lonely spot, yet anxious as to their almost empty purse, and the necessity of odious unpoetic work to fill it. At this moment a young friend, Raisley Calvert, died, bequeathing to Wordsworth £900, in the belief that freed from pecuniary care he might produce something that would benefit the world. So the money was judiciously invested, and on an income of "at least £80 a year," Dorothy proudly says, they began together the union which was to continue in some sorrow and much joy for five and fifty years. They settled for a time at Racedown on the borders of Somersetshire and Dorsetshire, in view of the Lewesdon Hill which Crowe's fine poem has made classical, where Wordsworth wasted himself in translations of Juvenal, and in constructing an unreadable tragedy called *The Borderers*. They visited Coleridge at Stowey, and, rambling as was their wont, lighted on a little combe, with tall trees, dashing brook, sequestered waterfall—a dell still known as the Poet's glen, where grows to-day, thick as moss in the deep moist shade, the rare and lovely Wilson's film-fern. The combe drained the grounds of a spacious park, with handsome house—its owner was a minor living out of England, and the agent was empowered to let it for a nominal sum. The pair gave up Racedown and settled themselves at Alfoxden. The house has been somewhat enlarged, but the rooms in which they lived remain. From the windows you look, as they looked, on lake-like reaches of the Severn sea; on the great dome-shaped wood, beneath which rises still, as Wordsworth recalls in *The Whirlblast*, "An under-grove of tallest hollies, tall and green"; on the ascending slopes of the elm-besprinkled park, with deer lying amongst its ferns. Miss Wordsworth's diary recounts their daily walks, together or with Coleridge; "William's" moods of composition, the completion of each fresh poem. The *Thorn* was written on the hill top above the house;

Simon Lee failed to chop his root in a little garden outside the park gates; in Holford village hard by Wordsworth met the weeping peasant with the *Last of the Flock* in his arms; *We are Seven* was meditated in the holly grove, and repeated over the tea table, with the "dear brother Jim," which modern editions omit. We get a sketch of Wordsworth's person at this time from Hazlitt—quaintly dressed in a brown fustian coat and striped pantaloons, a rolling lounging gait, high forehead, slightly furrowed cheek, a severe worn presence of thought about his temples. He read to them in a chanting sing-song *Peter Bell*, Coleridge following with *Betty Foy*. In 1798 the Lyrical Ballads appeared, and in the same year, leaving Alfoxden, the brother and sister departed for Goslar in Germany. In this dull secluded town they spent the coldest winter of the century: they failed to learn the language, but their sojourn was poetically productive. Some of his best lyric pieces, *Nutting*, *Ruth*, *Lucy*, *The two April mornings*, were here composed, and *The Prelude* was planned; its joyous opening lines, which some of us have murmured over on many a breezy hill-top, reflecting the glee with which they set out on their journey home. The world was all before them where to choose; beauty of scenery and proximity to Coleridge their only limitations. They chose the vale of Grasmere; walked to their new home from Sockburn, near Darlington, over frozen roads and amid frequent snow-storms, driving before the wind, as he tells us in *The Recluse*, like two birds, companions in mid-air, now parted, now united by the blast; till the second stage in the Poet's life began as they reached Dove cottage, or Town End as it was then called, under the welcome of a bright and solemn sunset, on the afternoon of the Shortest Day, 1799.

Few tourists who have visited Grasmere will traverse the old beggar woman's assertion to Miss Wordsworth, that it is the bonniest vale in England. Besides the exquisite distribution of mountain, water, woodland, the one island breaking the still mirror of its lake, the perfect greenery of the hill-sides even to their summits, the graceful undulations of the margining shores, there is an undescribable atmospheric influence—softening, etherealising, blending all, which no other valley yields. A man's first view of it as he emerges

from the Red Bank on to Loughrigg Terrace is an era in his life; one sees, rejoices, marvels—cannot analyse—even Wordsworth failed in that:

"'Tis—but I cannot name it—'tis the sense
Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
A blended holiness of earth and sky,
Something that makes this individual spot
A whole, without dependence or defect,
Made for itself, and happy in itself,
Perfect contentment, unity entire."

The home of the Wordsworths stood beside the road, a field beyond stretching onward to the lake, not then barbarised by a vast hotel. It was and is a humble cottage with two yew trees breaking the glare of its white walls. The rooms within are little changed—there is the downstairs room wainscoted with dark oak, Dorothy's bedroom adjoining; the room above with its "half kitchen and half parlour fire," some eight by sixteen feet in area, and little more than seven feet high. Close at hand is Wordsworth's bedroom, with two small guest chambers, one of which they built, papering it with old newspapers. The tiny garden rose almost straight up the hill, and they contrived a well, fed by a murmuring rivulet or syke; rough steps to a rocky seat; an arbour, with a small terrace commanding the lake view; the whole separated from an orchard by a rude wall which Wordsworth piled himself, cramming its interstices with ferns. The garden is kept neat to-day, not judiciously planted. It contains flowers which cannot have been there a hundred years ago; it omits flowers which we know the sister and brother to have introduced. I should dearly love to handle it; to replace each year the scarlet runners with which they draped the naked walls; to add as far as possible all the plants commemorated in the poems, to establish a Wordsworthian flora.

Here, then, for two years the brother and sister lived alone. On every spot around they have left abiding marks. On the garden terrace he composed *The Celandine*, *The Robin and the Butterfly*, *The Oak and the Broom*, *The Emigrant Mother*, *The Green Linnet* building and flitting in the hazel tree, the two Cuckoo poems, puzzling all the morning over an epithet which finally took the form of "shouting" cuckoo! perhaps a recollection from a fine line in Dunbar's *Golden Terge*—

"The skyes rang with schouting of the larkis."

They met the *Leechgatherer* on White Moss; the *Recluse* was written in the upstairs room, Dorothy copying it from his dictation. The *Beggars* were encountered by her at the cottage gate; the *Two April mornings* flowed from him almost spontaneously in Easedale; *Michael* the shepherd lived in Greenhead Ghyll, just beyond the village; the *Wishing Gate*, or its descendant, still stands, names carved on each surface of its posts and bars. Every spot in the poems on the naming of places has been identified: the church in the *Excursion* with its crossed rafters, marble monuments, and footworn epitaphs, still shows the corner in which Wordsworth sat; the Pastor of the *Excursion* was the Vicar of the parish, and in the *Churchyard among the Mountains* the remains of the whole Wordsworth family are laid. Its daily life is told for us in Dorothy's journal. No working man would have lived more plainly. Tea they found mostly too expensive, meat was rarely seen. He chopped wood and brought in coal; she cooked, baked, washed, with help from an old Village Dame. Guests filled constantly the little chamber on the wall; Coleridge oftenest of all, coming in suddenly or late at night, sitting till dawn to talk, to hear Wordsworth's poems and to recite his own. John the sailor brother was a frequent inmate; "John's Walk" a quarter-deck promenade among the trees in a grove hard by. De Quincey came, and has left an immortal record of the home which was one day to be his own; Southey too, and, later, Walter Scott. We walk, says Dorothy, at all hours of the day; we row upon the water—William and John go fishing, I read German. Again and again we hear how William wearies himself with company; he goes to bed too nervous to sleep, she brings the *Faery Queen* and reads to him. Some chance speech of hers kindles inspiration, and he can neither eat nor sleep till the fit is past, leaving him weak as is a breaking wave. She is perpetually copying his verse, for his eyes made writing painful to him; they read together Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Chaucer—little else. At the end of 1800 appears at last the second volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*. As I handle the shabby little book, with its careless printing and its outrageous market value of to-day—as I read over *Hartleap Well*, *The Brothers*, *Lucy Gray*, *The*

Fountain, *Michael*, and the rest, I understand how the veteran readers of the opening century, suckled on Pope and weaned on Johnson, must have loathed it all; how the race of younger men, panting for simplicity of life, for loftiness of thought, for truth of diction, for some key to the perplexities of life, turned to this Zaphnath-paaneah, this Revealer of Secrets, such as no former literature enshrined, hailing him as more than a Prophet.

In October, 1802, a third inmate came to the cottage. Mary Hutchinson, the Poet's cousin, had been from childhood intimate with his sister and himself, and their marriage had been some time in contemplation. William and Dorothy set out on a three months' tour before the wedding day. He writes his exquisite *Farewell* to the little spot of mountain ground—she takes leave of it in her diary—"Dear Mary, dear William, the hour is come, I must prepare to go. The swallows! I must leave them, the wall, the garden, the roses—all. Dear creatures! they sang last night after I was in bed: seemed to be singing to one another, just before they settled to rest for the night. Well, I must go—farewell!" They ramble in Yorkshire; they visit London; the sonnet to Westminster Bridge composed as they pass over it on the coach top in the early dawn; go on to Calais; return to Gallow Hill where Mary was staying, and the two are married ten days later in the little Brompton Church. Dorothy and Mary are agitated; William, like Marjorie Fleming's bereaved turkey, is "more than usual calm." The three set off together in a post chaise; study the gravestones in Kirby churchyard while the horses feed. They rest for the night at a place called Leeming Lane, William ending the day with a sonnet which was not thought worth preserving. Next morning on they go, William leaving them ever and anon to search for waterfalls, until they reach Grasmere late in the evening after a four days' drive; hasten with candles into the garden to note the growth of trees and plants, and settle down to a life in no way different to that which went before, except that the figures on its stage are three instead of two. In all biography there is nothing so curious as the prompt facile adaptation of these three to their united life. It was due I think mainly to Wordsworth's passionless absorption in his being's end and aim. He was vowed to a visionary life, inspired, dedicated, called; there

was no room in his temperament for the delicious yet distracting raptures of a romantic life: his marriage was but an incident in his experience: his Mary, formerly a cousin and a guest, was now his wife—and that was all. Dorothy retained unimpaired the place which she had always held in his affections and his daily habits. The young wife, as sympathetic as she was tactful, fitted easily into the triune life, too noble-minded and too clear-sighted to begrudge a rival in the sister, content to win from the husband, if not vehement fondness, yet tranquil, life-long, continuous affection. For nearly six more years the Grasmere life flows on. We have the tour in Scotland. Walter Scott is visited at Lasswade. John Wordsworth dies at sea—a bereavement deeply felt and touchingly recorded, in the Poet's letters, in the lines on Peel Castle, in the last of the *Daisy Poems*, in *The Happy Warrior*, which he himself looked upon as his finest piece. By degrees the increasing family makes the little home straitened and impossible. They migrate to a farm house at Coleorton, lent them by Sir G. Beaumont; to Allan Bank, still in Grasmere; to the Vicarage, saddened by the death of two young children; till, in 1813, all removed to Rydal, and the third period of both the personal and the literary biography began beside lovely Rotha, second only to the Avon in associations of acquired sacredness. The lovely Rotha! yes. The old Greeks flung locks of hair into their running rivers. In a famous passage Wordsworth tells us the meaning of the rite. The inhabitants of Rydal to-day—some of them, that is—charge the Naiad of their divine stream with garden refuse, broken pots and pans, tin carcasses of devoured confections. The sentiment possibly is there, but it is latent, and I have not been able to interpret it.

It is more than forty-five years, since, travelling with a pupil in the Lakes, and armed with an introduction from the late Bishop Christopher Wordsworth, I visited Rydal Mount. My mind's eye still sees distinctly the drawing-room made familiar to me by Westall's lithograph; its painting of the Poet, its San Sisto Madonna, the portraits of the Duke of Wellington, and of Jemima Quillinan, the books, among which I picked out the copy of Daniel containing the fine quotation in *The Excursion*, the Luca di Giordano on the staircase, the paintings by Sir G. Beaumont, the cuckoo clock; all shown to me by William, the Poet's grandson,

whom I knew at Oxford, and whose strong likeness to the Haydon portrait hanging in my rooms was always remarked at the breakfast parties where he was present. Miss Edith Coleridge was set to make the tea, and I enjoyed an hour's talk, repeated on the following day, with Mrs. Wordsworth, not then blind, full of life and merriment. She spoke of Oxford, of my own College where her eldest son was educated, of my old master and friend Charles Wordsworth, whom she described as having been the most winning youth she ever saw. She was eloquent in her admiration of the Rydal Valley, pronouncing it to be loveliest in winter when none came to see it. She spoke often of her husband—"William" she always called him—delighted to find I could pass an examination in his writings. She sat, I remember, by the window, leaning back and shading her eyes, but bending forward eagerly when interested. Finally, I was handed over to the gardener, James Dixon, with whom, and with a wiry Dandie Dinmont terrier, I visited all the "points"—Mount, terraces, summer house, Nab well, gold-fish pond—James talking of his master, relating how he would let the servants off work the whole day long in skating time, pointing to the ferns and mosses clothing every spot, which Wordsworth would never suffer to be clipped or weeded.

Rydal then was, henceforth, for thirty-seven years the Poet's home; the home with which, witnessing at once the ebb of his poetic genius, and the flow of his poetic fame, Englishmen have learned especially to connect him. From the migration to the Mount, his life, still plain and frugal, relaxed something of its Grasmere austerity. Through Lord Lonsdale's influence he was made Stamp Distributor for the county; and while the labours of the office could be discharged by deputy, its emoluments set him at ease as to the education of his sons and the increased expenses of a larger house. The first-fruit of his new abode was the completion of *The Excursion* and its publication in quarto form, dedicated to the Earl of Lonsdale. It was followed after a year or two by *Peter Bell*, by *The White Doe of Rylstone* and *The Waggoner*, by the Duddon sonnets. He frequently visited London, where faithful Crabb Robinson everywhere followed and Boswellised him; travelled on the Continent, in Scotland, and in Ireland. In 1830 a cruel blow fell upon him in his sister's illness, issuing, ultimately, in

her mental aberration. In 1831 occurred his mournful farewell visit to Abbotsford, accompanied by his daughter Dora and his nephew Charles. Scott, though paralysis had set its mark upon him, was full of brightness; taking his guests, as Charles Wordsworth who was with them told me once, to Melrose and to Yarrow, inscribing in Dora's album the last lines he ever wrote, faulty in metre, in spelling, in signature; misquoted curiously in almost every report, even in Knight's *Wordsworth*. The beautiful Abbotsford sonnet is Wordsworth's own tribute to his friend, followed not long afterwards by the stanzas in his extempore poem on the death of Hogg. In 1839 he received the degree of D.C.L. from the University of Oxford, being presented in the theatre, with an overpowering reception, by John Keble, the Professor of Poetry. An eye-witness has told me how pleased was the old man by the cries of *William Wordsworth*, with which the undergraduates saluted him, and records meeting him afterwards at a private house where a young lady sang to him the lines on *Lucy*, set to music by Professor Donkin. A visit was paid to the old Quantock haunts, in 1841—"a farewell visit for life" he calls it, "and, of course, not a little interesting"; but the sadness must have balanced the interest, for Coleridge and Tom Poole were dead, and the beloved sister was insane. His companions were his wife and his daughter Dora, with her newly-wedded husband, Mr. Quillinan; from the sorrow of her subsequent death, after five years of married life, he never raised his head. Of the closing Rydal days Crabb Robinson is the best biographer. He tell us of the men and women who made its brilliant society in those days—Professor Wilson, Quillinan, De Quincey, Aubrey de Vere, Faber, Mrs. Fletcher, Miss Martineau, Lady Richardson, the Arnolds. On Southey's death he was made Poet Laureate, receiving about the same time, through Mr. Gladstone's good offices with Sir Robert Peel, a life pension of £300 a year. He chose the grave and attended the funeral of Hartley Coleridge, ordering a space to be marked out close beside it for his own interment and his wife's—"keep the ground for us," he said to the sexton, "we are old people, and it cannot be for long." Long it was not; he caught cold in watching a sunset on a chilly spring evening, and died a fortnight after the completion of his eightieth year—on the 23rd of

April, 1850—a day already memorable as that of Shakespeare's birth and death. He lies close beside the rippling murmuring Rotha—"William Wordsworth," when I saw it first in 1855, the only inscription on the slab of slate which formed his headstone. "He loved us all, sir," said the girl who showed me the grave, "he would lay his hand on the heads of us young ones—and his own was grey and bowed. He was never happy away from these valleys, and always came back to them the earliest he could." She had heard tell, she went on, that *The Excursion* was his finest poem—there were others she liked better. Her father had known the real Peter Bell—he was sometimes in Grasmere with his donkey—why Mr. Wordsworth had written a poem to her sister Sarah Mackareth—did I know it? it was headed "To a Westmoreland Girl." "See how this yew tree is worn, sir, on this side; that is because so many people pluck it to bear away—English people often—visitors from America most of all." I did as "many people" do; a sprig of the yew, with a frond of spleen-wort from the Rydal Terrace, still consecrates my copy of the poems.

The acceptance of Wordsworth's poetry by a general audience must depend mainly upon judicious selections from his first-rate work. Turned loose amongst his six volumes, an untaught reader may easily light upon unpleasing poems, and with a false impression close the book, to his own great loss. We have in the *chronology* of their production a trustworthy guide to choice. All his best poetry was produced at Stowey, Goslar, Grasmere: it is with this that the student fresh to his writings should begin, as issuing from his finest inspiration, and illustrating most exactly both the principle of his teaching and the secret of his power. Let me advise you, therefore, to omit the *Descriptive Sketches* and the *Evening Walk*, written before his wings were grown, and neither now nor at any time to read the *Borderers*. Of the Alfoxden poems first in time are *We are Seven*, the *Last of the Flock*, *Expostulation*, *Simon Lee*, the *Old Cumberland Beggar*, with, what to my mind is the noblest piece he ever wrote, *Tintern Abbey*, finishing with the *Pet Lamb* and the *Female Vagrant*. The *Cumberland Beggar* may be taken as a specimen of his *descriptive* power—the palsied hand scattering

involuntarily the crumbs of his scanty meal, the bow-bent weary movement, the kind feelings kindled by his helplessness in those whom he encountered cited as an apology for his infirm existence, the sympathetic elevation into dignity and beauty of what is naturally sordid and repulsive. In *Expostulation* you have Wordsworth's creed in little:—

"One impulse from a vernal wood
Will teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."

Simon Lee ends with the classic lines—

"I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Has oftener left me mourning."

The great Ode reaches a level of lyrical excellence which our poetry had not attained since Lycidas. Slightly declamatory here and there, it contains some of Wordsworth's most majestic lines:—

"The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep—
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life—
See the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

In *Tintern Abbey* is concentrated all of him that is most animatingly characteristic. It was composed during a walk from the Wye to Bristol and written down unaltered—a burst of absolute inspiration. Fragments of it—such as

"That best portion of a good man's life
His little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love"—

cling to us for ever. It was written in 1798; he recalls having visited the same spot five years before, and compares then with now. Of all tributes to his sister it contains the sweetest: no poem is so interpenetrated with his exquisite Pantheism.

To Goslar we owe *Lucy Gray*, just bordering here and there upon the infantine, yet a great poem, as fastidious Arnold admits. *Nutting* reproduces subtly the Grecian Hamadryad sympathy with the forms of Nature as individual personalities. *Lucy* was the favourite of Sara Coleridge—the girl shaped by nature into loveliness and ladyhood. In the *Poet's Epitaph*, as in *Rob Roy*, he discloses a power of

sarcasm alien from his usual secure serenity. Walter Scott in the *Antiquary* makes Monkbarons linger over the delicious lines in the *Fountain*—"No check, no stay," etc. When next you walk that way take Arnold's *Wordsworth* in your pocket, and read the Grasmere poems in the nooks where they were composed; the poetry will exalt each spot as the spot will illuminate each poem. Read *Michael* in Green Head Ghyll—the stones in the unfinished sheepfold lie there still in a moss-grown heap—read the *Green Linnet* under the apple trees in the orchard; listen to the stockdove cooing in the Brother's Grove, and to the cuckoo's wandering voice coming to you as it came to him across the lake from Silver How. Read the *Farewell* as you lift the latch of the little gate to go; the *Happy Warrior* as you step the Sailor's walk; the *Old Leechgatherer* beside White Moss pool. Follow the pictures in this: the sunny morn fresh from last night's rain—the hare running races in her mirth, and raising as she runs a mist from the plashy earth—the dejection weighing on the poet, as with Burns, Hogg, Chatterton, in his mind he reflects on the mutabilities which Fortune may have laid up for himself—the unexpected apparition of the grey-haired man—

"Motionless as a cloud the old man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call,
And moveth altogether if it move at all"—

stirring the pond for leeches with his staff; his grave, resigned, yet independent speech; the dissipation of the poet's anxieties by this spectacle of moral dignity.

"I could have laughed *myself* to scorn, to find
In that decrepit man so firm a mind.
God, said I, be *my* help and stay secure;
I'll think of the Leechgatherer on the lonely moor."

Go further afield if you will. Walk in spring along Gowbarrow, where the *Daffodils* danced, and I am told still dance, beside Ullswater. Travel on to Ennerdale, with its lofty pillar and its bridge; sit in the churchyard of the little chapel and read in the *Brothers* how Leonard searched among the graves and went his way forlorn. All these are local; there remain one or two others belonging to that time. The lines on his Mary—

"She was a phantom of delight,"

—the song at the Feast of Brougham Castle, with its change at the close from the rapid martial menacing and jubilant

strain into the minor key of quiet, thoughtful, Nature-teaching.

"Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,
His daily teachers had been woods and rills;
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

Read finally the *Complaint*, ascribed to his quarrel with Coleridge; the *Reverie of poor Susan*, perfect from the first line to the last; the awful grandeur of thought and diction surrounding the *Borrowdale Yews*.

"Ghostly shapes
Here meet at moontide; Fear and trembling Hope,
Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton,
And Time the Shadow."

Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk then that which is worse. Reluctantly or not we must verify this saying in Wordsworth. His genius rose perhaps to its highest level in the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, written towards the end of the Grasmere stage. From that time it slowly faded, flashing up once with the old melody and inevitableness in the *Ode on an Evening of extraordinary splendour*, in 1818, where he recognises pathetically the exit from his stiffening brain of youthful glory and revelation, yet looks forward to the second *spiritual* birth, when he shall drink anew the wine which had lost its savour here. Of his remaining poems therefore I will speak more briefly. *The White Doe* I must count among his failures—not in historical ballad narrative lay his strength; no one who had read *Marmion* could follow the story of the Nortons. It fails in versification—scarcely one Wordsworthian bit is embedded in it; Francis is mawkish, Emily phantasmal; the Father martyrs himself and his seven gallant sons to a hopeless cause; it fails above all in supernaturalism; the Doe from first to last falls flat, as did Scott's White Lady:

"Unbought his works—his milk-white Doe
With dust is dark and dim,
Our bard is on the shelf—and oh!
The difference to him!"

was Hartley's mischievous epitaph on the unexciting animal. *Peter Bell* belongs to his early defiant period. The sight of a crescent moon, recollections of a wandering much married Potter, whom he had somewhere met, a desire to embody in verse his researches into the habits, tricks, and physiognomy

of the domestic ass—issued in that queer production. The childish opening; the Balaam-like dialogue between Peter and the meagre beast; the "party in a parlour," struck out of later editions—seem like intentional outrages on already irritated critics. The description of Peter's insensibility is Wordsworthian, and one passage from it has become the most hackneyed in all literature; but the poem deserves to be forgotten, as does Shelley's satirical continuation; born Wordsworthian as I am, I were content that it had not been written. *The Waggoner* is a pleasant itinerary; you will find it an enlivening companion in a walk from Rydal to Keswick; and in spite of his vinous peccadilloes you will feel strong sympathy with poor Benjamin. The three *Yarrow* poems link together Scott and Wordsworth; in the dawn of their fame and at its close. The subject is finally handled by the late Professor Veitch in his *Border Essays*. *Laodamia* sprang from his re-reading the Latin poets in order to prepare his son for college. So firmly did Virgil especially lay hold of him, that he gave up many months to what has been called the laziest of all occupations among the classics, to translating the Georgics into English; while from his study of VI. *Æneid* sprang this his one poem on heroic love. Something of the charm has gone from it, stately as it is, which haunted us in the Grasmere poems: something it has of sensuousness foreign to his usual temperament, yet something of conscious moral victory, which the days of his merely innate virtue lacked. *The Prelude*, not of the highest rank as a poem, will live as an autobiography in proportion to men's appreciation of its author. Self-dissections we have had before; of sentimentalists as Rousseau; of theologians as Blanco White and the brothers Newman; this is the unique instance from a great poet's pen of his own life history in mental education and development. Egoistic of course it is, and Wordsworth was the man to obtrude egoism rather than to veil it. Details there are of interest to the writer rather than to the reader; trifles common to all men, not peculiar to a poet; but I know no such revelation of a prophet's soul-birth, no such insight into the laboratory where a new spiritual mood was fashioning, a new organ of imagination building. You will mark as specially poetic the bathing in the Derwent, the skating on Esthwaite, the vision of the Arab on

his dromedary which so deeply moved De Quincey, the Boy mimicking the Owls, the Ash tree in St. John's garden, the Simplon Pass.

Were I bent on making men devotees of Wordsworth I should not begin by directing them to the *Excursion*. It is not a great poem; it is not Wordsworth at his best. It is as a Seer that we value him; rapt in vision he pours out song limpid, clear, and deep, from which, as from a power of Nature, we take in the revelation which his notes transmit; most potent as a Teacher when he forgets his hearers in his subject. In the *Excursion* he becomes consciously didactic; he deserts the rhapsody for the sermon, and from the born preacher all healthy souls recoil—"Oh, the Parson!" cried Goethe, as Crabb Robinson took him through the pages of *Despondency Corrected*. It is an epic, without plot, without machinery, without action; its heroes, the Wanderer and the Pastor, tell the same tale in the same doleful accents; only its reprobate, the Solitary, saves it from continuous commonplace. It contains splendid fragments; for in the opening walk across the Common, in Margaret, in the Sunlight pageantry, in the lively Grecian; in the images of the mountain brook, the ample moon, the smooth-lipped shell, the rowan berries; in the Solitary's bride, the Lamb's bleat, the tales of the Hanoverian and Jacobite, and of Ellen and Joyful Tree; we have the Wordsworth of Lucy, of the Yews, of Tintern Abbey; but the teaching in which these gems are set is of average pulpit value, sinks both in thought and language to the respectable but pedestrian level of conventional synagogism.

It remains to notice the *Sonnets*, forming as they do a very large proportion of his writings. The Sonnet is the cameo of poetical literature, insignificant in dimensions, dependent for acceptance on minute workmanship and perfect finish. Shakespeare found in it a passionate outlet for personal emotion; Milton snatched at it as a relief to suppressed poetic feeling; Wordsworth conceived its expansion into sequent utterances on a single subject, each complete in itself, yet each a stanza in a larger poem. In no department of his writing is more ruthless excision necessary if we would rid ourselves of the alloy and retain the gold. Of his 260 Sonnets, Arnold reproduces 60—some even of these I could resign—the residuum is above rubies. They contain the essence of his highest gifts; melody of style, truth of

subject, condensation of thought. He had acquired too the poetic knack which goes far to make the fortune even of an inferior sonnet, majesty in the closing line. Let me notice as those which seem to myself supreme—*Personal Talk, Sleep, Milton, The two voices, It is a beauteous evening, Mutability*; and let me read to you three specimens. The first is local, and will appeal to most dwellers in and round Ambleside. [The Sonnet to Wansfell was read.] The second is descriptive. He crosses Westminster Bridge at daybreak on a July morning. Amid its densest squalor *he* could at all times see the country in the town—witness poor Susan, the Farmer of Tilbury Vale, the walk up Fleet Street in snow—but here the veil is stripped away by Nature's *own* hand—crowds, sordor, clamour, smoke, are gone—the sun and the river reign triumphant. [The Westminster Bridge Sonnet was read.] The third represents him, Mark Pattison was wont to say, in his highest, most benign, most efficacious ethical mood. [*The world is too much with us* was read.]

Here then we make an end. The pieces I have read must needs be a delight to those who knew the Master; a guide I hope to those who have read him unadvisedly or not at all. In proportion as they have been wisely selected and justly rendered they reveal the secret of his excellence. The aim of all mankind is happiness—to show the way to that is the highest function of the Poet. Wordsworth found it in Nature and Humanity; in the joy which is imparted to us by the beauty of the external world, by the heavenliness of simple human duties and affections, if we have eyes to see them. To open *our* eyes in vision like his own, to make clear the spiritual mysteries which lie ever behind the cloud of habit, of prejudice, of worldliness—as the eyes of the prophet's servant were opened to the angelic squadrons camping round about his master's lowly home—that was the mission, unconscious or declared, of every song he sang. He gazed on Nature till his face shone like the face of that other prophet in the mount—gazing on him we catch something of its light upon ourselves. Side by side with the Immortals in the power as in the body of his highest work, he stands apart from them in illuminative beneficence: in that he had no predecessor, no compeer,—he has found so far no successor. [Matthew Arnold's *Memorial Verses*, April, 1850, were read.]